

# *Australian* Garden HISTORY

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*Collector's edition*

**Cover:** The black swan is an Australian natural history oddity, and its reinterpretation as a tyre swan has become an indigenous garden icon—see our story on page 17.

Photo: Mick Bradley  
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**Right:** Bell glasses or cloches played a large part in early horticulture and the use of glass in the garden was once widespread—read about one of Australia's outstanding collections on page 5.

Photo: Leon Tang,  
The Foto Factory, Perth  
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# Constant striving

Peter Timms

come across as a little churlish. This is what distinguishes garden-making from other forms of art: completion is not an option (despite what all those television make-over programs would have us believe). The gardener's materials—plants, soils, weather—are notoriously capricious. A moment's inattention and your topiary chickens have gone feral, borers are devouring the orchard, and bamboo is lifting the bathroom floor. It is as if paint on canvas were to keep rearranging itself overnight, forcing the artist into an unrelenting battle to maintain the intended image. Gardening would be Sisyphean were it not for the fact that, for most of us, most of the time, its never-endingness is not an unbearable burden but the main attraction.

Gardening and collecting are, therefore, perfect companions because the collector, too, is always striving toward consummation. Serious collecting, like gardening, represents a constant state of becoming. That, after all, is the point. In short, both activities contain a strong element of eroticism. Google the word 'eros' and you will be confronted with thousands of sites offering what is loosely called sexual pleasure. We can blame the Romans for that. To the Greeks, however, Eros, the embodiment of love and beauty, was the power that made transformation possible. He represented a perpetual longing for—and deferral of—fulfillment.

Generally speaking, collectors begin by establishing categories. If they did not, they would be merely hoarders. It is the negotiation of boundaries that is exciting. Those boundaries must be flexible enough to allow plenty of scope yet sufficiently circumscribed to suggest—at least in theory—that someday the collection might be complete; although in practice, of course, that would rather defeat the purpose. A collection that is no longer evolving, one whose boundaries have been reached, ceases to be a vital living thing. French eighteenth-century clocks might be decided on, Australian garden edging tiles, epiphytes of South-East Asia, or used globs of chewing gum. Sometimes, as that last example suggests (it is a real one, by the way), what is chosen for collection matters less than the urge to gather, classify, and order, purely for its own sake.

A Freudian might say (and Freud wrote a good deal on the subject, being a notable collector of antiquities himself) that the collector is seeking a sense of control over the world. However chaotic things might be out there, this small part of it is all harmony and clarity of purpose. The collector is, in other words, seeking comprehension through the modeling of an ideal order. He or she (although interestingly, from a Freudian point of view, it is much more often he) is evoking the past while simultaneously erasing it through the creation of something timeless.

However, all this may strike you as rather blinkered, turning collecting into a pathology. What about pleasure? And, more to the point, connoisseurship? Thomas Hoving, one-time director of New York's Metropolitan Museum, thought collecting was 'one of the most exciting endeavors in life, as dramatic, emotional, and fulfilling as a love affair.' Well yes, if you are pursuing medieval icons or Rembrandts as he was. Souvenir tea towels or globs of chewing gum don't quite make the grade.

All collectors will tell you they get pleasure from what they do. Otherwise, why bother? To experience a real love affair, however, you must cultivate expertise, perseverance, good judgment, the capacity for research and analysis, even courage.

'When will it be finished?' It is the question every gardener dreads. The correct answer, of course, is 'Never', although that might

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You must be aiming not just to amass things but to uncover new facts, forge new connections, and raise standards.

It follows that the most satisfying collections will be those offering the most scope to ripple out into ever larger spheres of interest, forging ever more fruitful connections. They are the core around which ideas and narratives crystallise. Call me biased, but it seems to me that those relating to garden history are, by their very nature, potentially more satisfying than most. They are at the medieval-icon-and-Rembrandt end of the scale. Darth Vader figurines and Coca Cola bottles, however fascinating in themselves, are much less so, if only because of their short histories and restricted cultural resonance.

A collection of Hakeas or conifers, garden tools, or seed catalogues opens up limitless potential for discovery, not only in the field of garden history itself, but in botany, horticulture, geology, social history, climate science, anthropology, and countless other fields. The collector of rhododendrons, for example (as distinct from the gardener who just has a lot of them) will be able to tell you not just about the conditions they favour, but what parts of Asia the various species come from, how their individual characteristics evolved, when and by whom they were introduced into Europe, and a lot more besides. He or she might well have trekked the Himalayas in search of

greater understanding and new specimens. In other words, their collections are not ends in themselves but windows onto other realms.

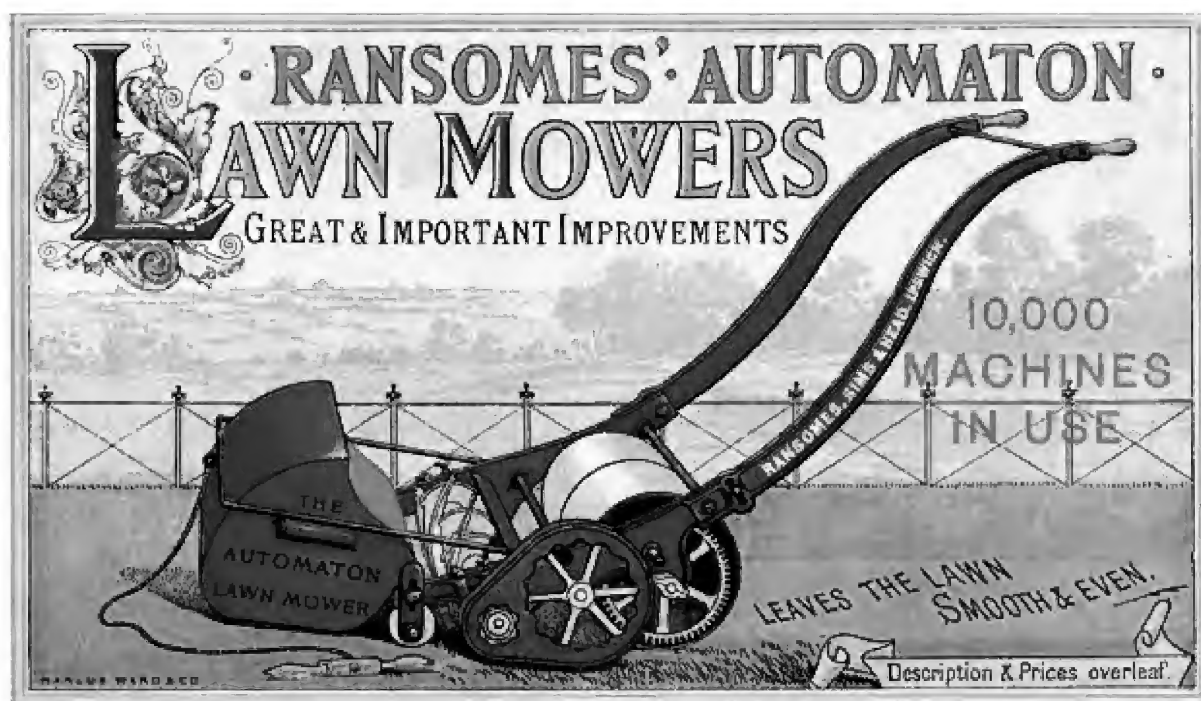
And, of course, collecting plants, in whatever form, means interacting with living beings—breeding, feeding, and nurturing. Not just acquiring things but creating them and, perhaps, saving them from extinction, which makes it doubly rewarding and doubly demanding.

As he traveled the world in search of new treasures for the Metropolitan, Thomas Hoving could draw on a vast body of historical knowledge and an international network of professional scholars. He could hardly go wrong. The garden historian, especially here in Australia, has far fewer resources and must rely heavily on private collectors and amateur enthusiasts—those dedicated souls who, for whatever Freudian reason, have amassed, preserved, catalogued, and studied nursery catalogues, books and magazines, garden plans, garden furniture and accessories, plant specimens, and documentary records. It is they, far more than the public collecting institutions, who are providing the material evidence on which the nascent discipline of garden history is being built. May they never reach fulfilment!

Peter Timms is a freelance writer living in Hobart. He is the author of nine books, including *Private Lives* and *In Search of Hobart*.

The invention of the lawn mower in the early nineteenth century brought about great changes to the maintenance of gardens—see our story about garden tools on page 11.

Image: Richard Bird collection





John Viska

## *Handle with care: collectable glass for the garden*

How many of us could identify a fairy light, a celery glass, a wasp trap, a boutonniere, or that great rarity, a cucumber straightener? Enter into the arcane world of horticultural glass with its Australian champion.

### **Out of the furnace**

I've been collecting glass since the early 1980s after being given a Georgian rummer by a very generous second-hand dealer. That started my quest and whilst mainly finding drinking glasses, other more unusual items also turned up. As I became au fait with glassmaking methods and being interested in garden history and horticulture, certain items started to appear, sometimes not recognised or correctly identified by the dealer. At other times I purchased

irrespective because the item was the first one and probably the last one you're ever going to see of a certain piece.

Glass has been around for thousands of years and as horticultural techniques developed, specialised products were developed for different plants. In Britain from 1745 glass was taxed, so horticultural glassware was an expensive commodity, normally only found on the bigger estates—after the repeal of the glass tax in 1845, however, glass items became a far cheaper commodity and therefore more commonly used until it was ultimately superseded after the Second World War by plastics. Additionally broken glassware (cullet) could be recycled. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century the majority of glassware used in Australia was imported from England.

Horticultural glass came in all shapes and sizes—in the latter part of the nineteenth century a squat shape became popular for hyacinth vases.

Bell glasses were fragile items in the garden and those with folded rims enjoyed enhanced strength and hence a greater survival rate.



These items were sold by businesses such as the big nurseries and seed suppliers; many nursery catalogues for instance had a section at the back detailing glass sundries. Newspapers also contained advertisements for such products.

With advent of pressed glass in the 1840s, manufacture became increasingly inexpensive, bringing certain glassware into the realm of the middle and lower classes, whereas blown glass remained particularly expensive. Pressed glass was an American invention where a calculated blob of

molten glass was dropped into a three-part metal mould. If the gunmetal mould was actually heated, the glass flowed better and the detailing could be even more intricate, and so by the late nineteenth century there were many different patterns.

## Bell glasses or cloches

The English call them bell glasses; the French, *cloches*; but each was the same—a clear glass dome with a knob at the top. They might cover a terracotta pot containing cuttings being propagated or germinating seeds or spores. For young vegetables (such as tomatoes) they might be used in the field to advance growth prior to the advent of warmer weather. Condensation could be a problem so each day the glass had to be slightly opened and propped—probably apprentices would do that—or the top part of the hollow knob ground to create a small hole. Bell glasses were in common use by the eighteenth century, when all were hand blown, and a folded edge gave extra strength to the rim preventing breakage. Early examples are now rare, although recently reproductions have become available.

## Wasp traps

Glass traps for wasps and fruit fly were squat, bulbous-shaped bottles with a flanged, upturned bottom. This formed a reservoir into which was placed a sweet liquid and the top sealed. In later examples this was a metal screw top; earlier the top had been blocked by a piece of paper tied over the top. Insects were attracted to the sweet liquid—this could be anything from old beer to a

Left: Wasp traps were hung up in fruit trees and other strategic places where sweet liquid in the bottles attracted and ultimately killed the insects.



Right: Glass fly traps had a very similar shape to wasp traps but stood on small feet to enable these traps to be slightly raised on horizontal surfaces.







mixture of water and sugar—and would approach from below and would then see the light above and fly up to the light. The insect couldn't escape out the top so would hit the side of the wall and as it kept doing this eventually wear itself out and then fall down the inside and drown in the liquid, hence adding to the smell, making it ever more attractive. Once the trap got too overpowering or filled, it was just simply washed out and then reused again. Although wasps were probably more of a problem in English gardens, with the introduction to Australia in the late nineteenth century of fruit fly, such traps became an essential item for the home orchard.

## Hyacinth vases

Growing hyacinths in water had been practised from Georgian times, becoming very popular in the nineteenth century. In growing hyacinths hydroponically it is vital that the bulb doesn't fall into the vase or reservoir of water, so these vases have a flange just below the opening. There was quite an art to growing hyacinths in vases to make sure they flowered properly and early gardening books often had a separate section on the subject. You filled the vase with water up to or just below the flange and the bulb sat in the upper part. They were then put into the dark and left until roots began to appear, growing longer and longer as they



searched for nutrients. When the leaves reached a certain height—the flower had already formed inside the bulb (from the previous season)—the vase would be brought out into the light. Initially the leaves were a creamy colour because they lacked chlorophyll, so the moment they were brought out into the sunlight they very rapidly started to go green and photosynthesise, the flower starting to open. So timing was critical. Too early and the flower wouldn't extend much; too late and the leaves had extended so much that they would then flop and the bulb was totally spent.

There were a variety of shapes and the earliest examples were all hand blown—later moulds were used to assist production. Hyacinth vases came in a variety of colours with blue, dark green, and turquoise the most common due to the availability of certain oxides used in glass making. Amethyst was not so common and red was quite rare because it utilised gold chloride and was far more expensive to produce. Glassmakers also became more adventurous in producing 'art glass' with a variety of new colours and patterns, some with quite spectacular effect—uranium, for instance, was added to produce a light green colour and opalescent effects became popular. Normally hyacinths were grown (and sold) in pairs—many early illustrations show them arranged symmetrically on a mantle—although often now you only find the odd single glass.

Hyacinth vases came in a variety of colours, with dark green and blue being the most common.

Three celery vases: on the left-hand side the earliest one is of thistle shape, hand blown (1850s); the middle one is pressed moulded glass (1890s), and on the right is another hand blown one with some cut decoration (1880s).



## Celery vases

Celery and cheese was a separate course in the mid-nineteenth century, brought to the table after the main course. The celery was trimmed and placed in the vase with iced water, the top of the stems just above the rim. Celery glasses are quite difficult to identify and it takes a practised eye. They look like a flower vase but tend to be of a slightly elongated shape (to take the bulk of the celery stems) with the base not particularly broad. It is this elongated shape that is the main point of distinction with normal flower vases. Although not originally used for flowers—many flowering plants in the nineteenth century did not have long stalks—these celery vases have now been rediscovered and are now eagerly sought for flower

arranging, taking a full, big bunch of flowers. Rarely today do you see a celery vase used for celery as part of a cheese-and-celery course.

## Glass frogs

These were circular, moulded glass accessories, usually of clear glass, designed for the bases of vases. They were perforated in radiating pattern allowing the stems of flowers to be placed in the holes to give stability to a flower arrangement. Sometimes they formed an integral part of a moulded vase. I believe they were patented in the late nineteenth century and were certainly used right up until the 1950s. Colours varied according to the fashions of the times, so in the 1920s to 1940s they were typically amber or green, matching the art deco style. In that period artificial glass flowers were blown and used as a permanent flower arrangement. There was a high mortality rate mainly because the glass cracked if dropped. The little spiked metal bases that became popular with Japanese flower arranging in the 1960s superseded them, and probably the style of arrangement the frogs suited had also become old fashioned. Glass frogs have become highly collectible today, reborn as a pen or pencil holder amongst the trendy retro set.



Vases of different shapes and sizes were used to flower a variety of bulbs other than hyacinths, such as crocus, narcissus, hippeastrum, and amaryllis.

## Fairy lights

Fairy lights were very commonly used throughout Victorian times and into the Edwardian era—typically they might be used for special events or garden parties. They either had a little floating wick in them (fuelled by a thin layer of oil over water) or a small candle. They had a high



mortality rate because of the very cheap pressed glass and their propensity to crack with the heat. Fairy lights were sold by the box and a whole range of colours was found, from clear through to blue, green, red, and even an opalescent or milk glass, all usually patterned. They were labour intensive to string up and take down, and were superseded when coloured electric lights became more freely available. Because of their poor survival rate they are now very rare, with some colours are much rarer than others. There are modern reproductions but when compared with original pieces they lack a certain finesse. I once gave a talk about fairy lights and after I had described what they were, an English lady in the audience exclaimed: 'Oh, so that's what the purpose was'. She had once had boxes of them in her cellar and used them as small vases for flowers—when she came to Australia obviously only a few survived, but she kindly gave me a cobalt blue one with a quilted pattern which I now treasure.

## Night lights

Night lights had a dual purpose, to provide a little flickering light at night, sometimes in a child's bedroom or such, but also for decorative ends and could be placed along edges of garden paths for festive occasions. They were generally made out of pressed glass, with a quilted pattern, so were very cheap to produce. The bottoms were normally patterned clear glass while the upper parts were a variety of colours similar to fairy lights. A small candle provided light and the standard design had a hole in the top so the hot fumes could escape. Even so they still warmed up and the upper part often cracked, meaning their survival rate has not been particularly high. Often on the dining table a small group of lights would



Known as 'frogs', these aids to flower arranging came in a variety of sizes, dome shaped as well as flat topped, to suit different vase shapes.

be assembled on a metal stand, giving the hostess a choice of colours to accent the setting. They might also be made out of blown glass, patterned in a mould and the top part could be opalescent or even two toned, yielding a quite spectacular effect to really wow the guests, almost entering the realm of art glass. But at the lower end they were just pressed glass, easily reproduced and many reproductions are now found. Sometimes they become isolated and the red ones end up in front of statues of the Virgin Mary leading to their renaming as Marion lamps.

## Boutonnieres

Any well-dressed gentleman—certainly in the horticultural field, such as a nursery proprietor or horticultural show official—would always have in their buttonhole a flower. For it to last all day it had to be in water, hence the glass buttonhole or boutonniere, a thin tube, the top angled and

Left: Fairy lights were made out of cheap pressed glass with a copper wire hanger so they could be suspended, strung up in trees or on a rope to light gardens at night.

Right: Unlike fairy lights, night lights were not suspended but made of two parts—a very shallow dish with a dome-shaped top.



Button-hole bouquet tubes—also known as boutonnieres—were glass or metal tubes suspended from the button-hole of a coat lapel designed to keep a small bouquet fresh (from Thompson's *Gardener's Assistant*).



quite full. Bouquets packed in this way are daily sent many hundreds of miles, and arrive safely and fit for use two days afterwards. This is found to be the most practical mode of transit. The handle of each bouquet should be secured to the box.

*Button-hole Bouquets.*—These consist of such flowers as a Rosebud, Gardenia, Picotee, or any other single flower, arranged with its own foliage or with Fern fronds. A combination of several kinds of flowers is rarely used. For keeping them fresh whilst they are being worn the best plan is to put them into a glass or metal tube suspended from the button-hole behind the fold of the coat; these are supplied by florists for the purpose. (See fig. 776.)

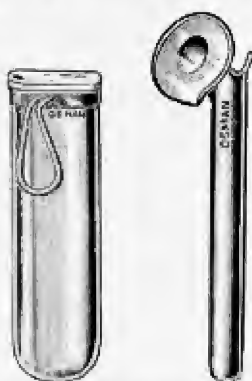


Fig. 776.—Button-hole Bouquet-tube.

slightly flared. Flower buds (like Cecile Brunner roses), a little piece of fern, or even an open flower (such as a carnation) were recommended for buttonholes and this was certainly not seen as being effeminate if worn by males as part of their dress apparel. They might also be made out of silver, which would have been far more expensive, or chrome plated metal, but glass was affordable and expendable.

Out of all my horticultural glass items these are probably the rarest survivors, as being thinly blown glass they could be easily broken if too much pressure was put on a lapel. Sometimes if found, there are no clues to their actual use and many ended up on dining room tables of 1960s' dinner parties holding flowers for individual place settings (even though the water might have flowed out). Curiously they have a pair of little glass legs behind, possibly to allow them to stand proud of the lapel or to stop the boutonniere from slipping down through it.

Do I have any regrets in my collecting? I'm yet to find a cucumber straightener. This was probably the rarest item of horticultural glass, a sausage-shaped bottle without a bottom in which cucumbers were forced to grow straight. I live in hope!

## Further reading

Alistair Morris, *Antiques from the Garden*, Garden Art Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1996.

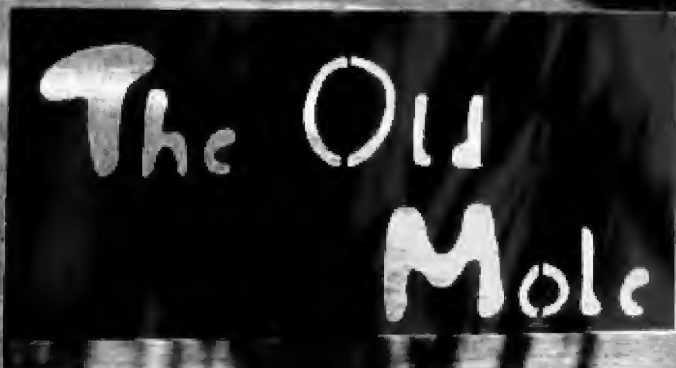
Suzanne Slesin et al, *Everyday Things: garden tools*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1996.

Suzanne Slesin, Daniel Rozensztroch, & Stafford Cliff, *Everyday Things: glass*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 2001.

Rupert van der Werff & Jackie Rees, *Miller's Garden Antiques: how to source and identify*, Miller's, London, 2003.

**John Viska** is a member of the Australian Garden History Society National Management Committee and a long-time collector in the fields of garden history and the domestic interior.

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Richard Bird

## *The Old Mole and his tools: a man and his mission*

The Old Mole collection of gardening tools and implements is in a state of flux—its creator reminisces about its formation, his passion for collecting, and the collection's future.

Heligan, the well-known garden in Cornwall, is effectively where The Old Mole started. It was 1996 and my wife Lynne Walker had just been appointed as co-ordinator in the New England area for Australia's Open Garden Scheme. She wished to expand her knowledge by visiting gardens overseas whilst I wanted to catch up with relatives. Now, I don't know much about plants but I like gardening and whilst Lynne was looking at plants, I soon found the potting shed at Heligan. Being inquisitive, I saw all these magnificent tools and was just intrigued. 'I want to have some of these at home' I remarked.

I remembered some of them from my grandfather in the UK and when we got back to London we saw a few more tools, bought a hand trowel, and went to the gardening museum at Lambeth. When we got back to Australia I started looking. I visited lots of nurseries and lots of antique shops and said 'where do I find these tools?' 'Well', they replied, 'you find them where you find them' and so I decided to look. I got in touch with a couple of dealers in the UK and purchased some quite small parcels of tools. Some of them are almost irreplaceable now and we decided to make a business of it, buying and selling old garden tools and implements. As we couldn't get quality trowels and hand forks, we decided to make these ourselves. We had a blacksmith up the road and a wood turner in Armidale, all traditional craftspeople.

I originally wanted to be an archaeologist but my mother said 'you'll have to learn about rocks' so I decided to become a geologist. I worked

Richard Bird outside the head office of The Old Mole, near Armidale, NSW.  
Photo: Richard Aitken

The Old Mole collection of gardening tools and implements comprises between 700 and 800 items, carefully formed over the last decade and a half.  
Photo: Lynne Walker



with mining engineers before joining a family engineering company and then we started farming at Devil's Pinch, between Armidale and Guyra. Obviously you use a few tools for farming but I had no real interest and then suddenly this Heligan thing just exploded. Apart from buying and selling, The Old Mole also collects tools and our collection now comprises between 700 and 800 items. I've tried to make the collection as complete as I can, guided by texts such as Anthony Huxley's *Illustrated History of Gardening* and Suzanne Slesin's *Garden Tools*. I've also concentrated on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although I'm now moving on to antiquities: it's extraordinary to realise that there is very little new in gardening tools.

I'm not sure what the definition of a tool is, but I usually refer to them as a collection of implements, because I think tool probably suggests that they're all single items operated by one person. An implement can also include agricultural

connotations, but I don't know where you draw the line between agriculture, horticulture, and gardening—you go from somebody who has a big vegetable garden, to a walled kitchen garden that had lots of employees, to a market garden, to a farm. Where's the difference?

There is, I think, a very pleasing aesthetic in old tools, which also had a great fitness for purpose. So many of the older tools were handmade and while they might have been made in factories, they were made by a man with a bit of red hot metal and hammers and all that sort of thing. Therefore there's a tactile sense about them—these people were craftspeople and they used the aesthetics of shape so much more than the modern way of manufacturing, which is mostly straight lines and angles. A lot of the tools were regarded as the sort of thing that a craftsman used and he might therefore put his initials on them. So there's a lovely feeling there that the man—and it was almost always men—who had their initials or name on the tool had some sort of connection with that individual piece. I think this is one of the delights of collecting—it's not just having a series of tools for the sake of having them, but a real personal connection.

We've had a marvellous time collecting, and buying and selling these tools. It's only a hobby basically but it's been very, very satisfying—it's lovely when people come and pick up the tools and say 'No, I don't quite like that handle, I think I'll have that one'. But when I looked at what was likely to happen in the next few years the last thing I wanted was a clearing sale. Quite a few of the items are museum quality; they're not just old tools. And so I approached a number of colleagues from the Australian Garden History Society and said 'Look, we've got this collection. Quite a few of you know what it looks like and what it's about. Is there anywhere that you think of that could be interested?' It wasn't until about a year or so later that Richard Heathcote of Carrick Hill came up to inspect. Now Richard is a bit whimsical, like me in some respects, and he had been one of my first purchasers—a beautiful potato fork, which I was later told he had hanging in his dining room—so I knew that we shared similar thoughts. I wrote to Richard and he came back and said 'Look, we're thinking of doing something now that you've made this offer' and we're now in the process of transferring the collection. If it's going to a place that's going to look after it better than I can then I'm more than happy, especially since some of these things can be used as educational tools to give a continuity of history, hopefully to the next generation.



From watering cans to lawn mowers—no item is too common or too obscure for Richard Bird and his collection.  
Photos: Richard Aitken



## Recommended reading

Anthony Huxley, *An Illustrated History of Gardening*,  
Paddington Press Ltd in association with the Royal  
Horticultural Society, New York & London, 1978.

Suzanne Slesin et al, *Everyday Things: garden tools*,  
Abbeville Press, New York, 1996.

**Richard Bird** is The Old Mole. He has recently gifted his collection of garden tools and implements to Carrick Hill as the foundation collection of a proposed Australian gardening museum.





Trisha Arbib

## *Victorian-era garden edging tiles*

A group of tiles from my collection illustrates the great diversity of patterns within the same basic design.

This is a story of garden edging tiles, detective work, graveyards, and obsessives: what more can you want?

Collecting Victorian-era garden edging tiles may seem rather peculiar, but my partner Howard Nicholson and I found them beautiful and were intrigued by the variety of their flower, leaf, and geometric designs. But very few had the potter's mark on them and almost none had a date, so we knew very little about them.

My jumping off point for information was the internet, searching via Google, book sites, and eBay. I gleaned information from books on old Australian potteries, Victorian-era garden books, garden histories, museum collections, and old

catalogues, but little of substance had been written. An article by Jim Cothran, and a major Australian book on bricks and tiles by Allan Hackett in 2009 are rare exceptions. My search has taken me to old cemeteries, forged links with other collectors and with descendants of old potteries, and to the collections and libraries of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum and the Historic Houses Trust. Perhaps my greatest thrill was being taken by the curator to view the tiles in the basement of the Powerhouse Museum.

Before garden edging tiles there was dwarf English box. But it harboured snails and needed clipping. One Australian writer in 1878 lamented that 'to make neat edgings [i.e. of box] requires the skill of something more than the ability of my man John or many of our rural gardeners'.



The first reference I found to the use of tiles in England as a box substitute was by Jane Loudon in *Gardening for Ladies* (1843), but the earliest known reference to tiles designed specifically for garden edging was in the *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* (1852) for tiles made by Robert Hogg selling at 10s 6d per 100.

The great advantage of tiles was that they were decorative and practical, and brought neatness and order to Victorian and Edwardian gardens, especially kitchen gardens and those of the suburban villa.

Critics asserted they were difficult to keep in a straight line and upright and questioned their durability. William Robinson writing in 1870 (obviously not a fan) also decried their aesthetics: 'Pottery edgings are enough to spoil the prettiest garden ever made, and are as much at home round a country seat [estate] as a Red Indian at a mild evening party.'

And yet in Britain by 1870, and a little later in Australia, there was an array of designs, colours, sizes, and glazes. Designs often reflected movements in art and architecture such as Gothic revival, rustic, and art nouveau styles, and nationalistic symbols like the thistle and the rose. Surprisingly the only Australian symbol I've found is our coat of arms.

But early in the twentieth century garden design changed to open lawns and informal groupings of trees and shrubs with less use of geometrical beds. Tiles began to be seen as a relic of Victorian era clutter. By 1927, writing in *Australian Home Beautiful*, Edna Walling observed: 'These are rarely resorted to now, but one is sometimes confronted with them in a garden which leaves you in a wondering state of mind as to what to do with the legacy. They will be quite all right if they are taken up and set upside-down!'

*Surprisingly the only  
Australian symbol I've  
found is our coat of arms*

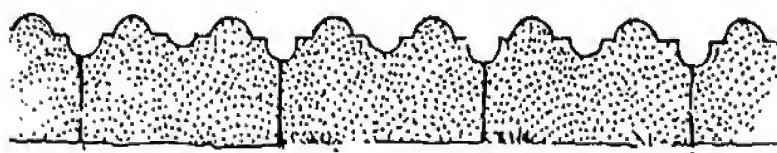
Stoneware and terracotta tiles were manufactured in potteries and brickworks as one small part of their output, together with large productions of bricks and drainage pipes, and perhaps chimney and flower pots.

What's left of Gulson's pottery is just down the road from me in Goulburn. Francis Gulson and his brother Luke came from a potters' family in

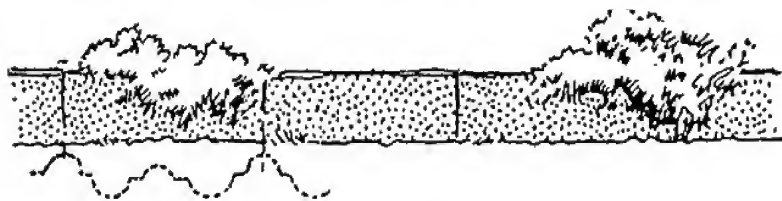
England as so many of the founders of Australian potteries did. They went to Albury first in 1865, where Luke soon married a widow with a run-down brickworks. Luke stayed, but Francis and brother Thomas left for Goulburn in 1884 where Francis founded Gulson's. They supplied the local district for many years with bricks, pipes, paving tiles, garden edging, chimney pots, and flower pots. It stopped manufacturing in 1989.

Gulson's garden edging tile is distinctively narrow, with the pottery's name made out in raised dots. The abstract pattern of a series of nine hemispheres connected by lines has no

Sketches and  
comments by Edna  
Walling in *Australian  
Home Beautiful*, 1927.



AN UNWELCOME LEGACY



THE PROBLEM SOLVED

reported meaning, and I've seen it nowhere else. A similar tile turns out to be a modern copy, taller wider and thicker, made of a much coarser brick clay, and stamped GULSON GOULBURN on the back. John O'Rourke, a descendant who lives in Gulson's cottage next to the pottery, can remember making them in the 1980s.

A fairly common design features two large flowers, like rosettes, at the top. One pottery that made them was Mashman's in Willoughby in the late 1800s. They are still operating in Kingsgrove where I spoke with Mike Mashman, the founder's great grandson, who was making a range of reproduction edging tiles until about ten years ago. Drought reduced demand and the machines were decommissioned. Plain two-crested reproduction tiles were chosen by Hazel Hawke for Kirribilli House when Bob Hawke was prime minister. Bob's response was that they would make a good target for his putting practice.

Dr James Broadbent, formerly of the Historic Houses Trust, suggested I look at some old Goulburn graves, in St Saviour's cemetery (reached via Cemetery and Mortis Streets). The experience was quite surreal; all was tranquil in the old cemetery and just across the way the huge



The remains of Gulson's pottery in Goulburn. Founded in 1884 by Francis Gulson, it ceased manufacturing just over a century later, in 1989.

gaol wall topped with barbed wire loomed above. I found three early graves bordered by simple tiles with two small circles on top. One grave was dated 1903. Edgings can always be added later, but Historic Houses Trust dates the double dot tiles as c.1900. It's interesting that tiles from the nearby Gulson's pottery weren't chosen. But these Sydney tiles were common and could have been cheaper.

Although no longer fashionable, garden edging tiles are still of interest for restoring Victorian-era gardens, for collectors, or just because you like the look of them. Tiles can be found from \$15 to \$40 each at auctions, at antiques and collectables fairs, in old wares and antique stores, in gardens, and on the internet.

## Acknowledgements

Avid collectors Bob Fielding and Silas Clifford-Smith showed me their collections and were a fund of information.

Megan Martin at the Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection of the Historic Houses Trust, and curator Dr Paul Donnelly and librarian Philippa Rossiter at the Powerhouse Museum were extremely helpful.

I should also like to thank Dr James Broadbent, John O'Rourke, Mary and Leon Willis, Mike Mashman, Geoff Ford, and Bundanoon potter Bruce Pryor. And I wouldn't have my collection if it hadn't been for the equal passion of Howard Nicholson for old garden edging tiles.

## Recommended reading

Jim Cothran, 'Victorian garden edging tiles', *The Magazine Antiques*, 164 (2), August 2003, pp. 80–89.

Allan M. Hackett, *Turn of the First Clay: Our brickmaking heritage*, The Author, Llandilo, NSW, 2009.

Ken Arnold, *Collecting Australian Found Stoneware*, Crown Castleton Publishers, 1989.

**Trisha Arbib** worked in education research, then for 28 years in the Bundanoon Village Nursery in NSW's Southern Highlands, which she co-owned with Howard Nicholson. It is quite likely the only nursery to have given customers a taste of sloe gin to encourage a tree sale.

This article is based on a talk given to the Southern Highlands Branch of the Australian Garden History Society in September 2009.



Richard Heathcote

## *Swanning around: the tyre swan in the Australian garden*

The tyre swan is a distinctively Australian garden ornament although, as historian James Broadbent lamented a decade ago, 'the ornithology and habitat of this endangered species is, as yet, improperly studied'.

Would you find it tiresome to have the story of a tyre swan collection commence with a road trip? Tracking the history of this unusual garden ornament has involved much mirth and is integral to its appeal. In fact humour is at the centre of this collection whether it be provoked by a viewer's derisory remarks or stimulated by genuine amusement at the ingenuity it takes to form these ornamental swans.

As any readers who are collectors will know, collecting leads you on a continuous journey in search of the object of your desire. On many sojourns you do not find what you are hunting for but then, out of the blue, there appears the 'find' of a lifetime. Well so it was for me when I collected my first tyre swan.

### **White swan**

In 2005 an Adelaide dealer friend of mine suggested a road trip to Melrose, a small town at the beginning of the Flinders Ranges, with stops at townships along the way. I was interested in seeing these street-towns with their broad main road wide enough for manoeuvring bullocky drays in the halcyon days of the copper boom. By the third town I was tiring of vapour trailing

the antique shops, with their predictable offerings, when the dream encounter took place in a builder's recycling yard. There sitting regally on an old steel drum was a white tyre swan for the princely sum of \$25. My friend castigated me for not haggling over the price but to be overcharged at the outset of establishing a collection is not a big sin.

Prior to this moment I had engaged in research to prepare for hunting the tyre swan. It began with James Broadbent's entry in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* and the OCAG editor's concurrent call-to-arms in the illustration caption: 'Tyre swans, rising like mythical characters from a lost Australia on lawns or in beds and borders, may soon only exist in the imagination or memory if urgent steps are not taken to safeguard this endangered species.'

## Black swan

'Sophie'—as she became known—was taken back to my suburban home garden in Adelaide and was soon joined by 'Schwarzey', a black tyre swan that my dealer friend had picked up in a local auction. I was particularly grateful and felt that I now had a truly indigenous avian member (*Cygnus atratus*)



in my collection. My sights were now set on a breeding pair, but where-oh-where would such mates emerge?

During the interregnum I began to reflect on why I had taken so easily to building a tyre swan collection. Many friends and professional colleagues regarded them as items of kitsch and those with a degree more tolerance still felt this quirky folk art object was an affectation on my part—not a passion to be taken seriously. At the opposite end of my deliberation is the notion that this unique Australian garden ornament, ingeniously made from a recycled car tyre, forms the perfect antidote to the irksome ubiquity of reproduction garden ornaments.

So where did the true attraction lie? In Greek mythology the swan occupies a well-established

'The ornithology and habitat of this endangered species is, as yet, improperly studied. Until verified sightings are recorded in Europe, Asia, or the Americas, it must be assumed to be an indigenous species (both black and white) of mainly coastal Australia, ranging in latitude from Tas. to northern Qld. Sightings in WA have yet to be confirmed. Its habitats appear... to be determined by their eco-systems'

James Broadbent, 'Tyre swan', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* (2002), pp.607–8

status through the myth of Leda and the swan: a queen of Sparta and wife of King Tyndareus, Leda was seduced by the god Zeus in the guise of the swan. There were several versions of the parentage of her children. This contorted tale of erotic goings on influenced many artists to depict the scene of Zeus's transformation to a swan (to gain Leda's favours despite her marriage to the King). In literature and art, many writers and artists—Ovid, da Vinci, and Michelangelo included—drew on the myth. Swans were elegantly depicted in masques for both the French and English royal courts as well as being made into watercraft for boating at pleasure gardens such as those at Vauxhall and Ranelagh in eighteenth-century London.

Two types of design are represented in my collection. The first required the tyre to be turned inside out while the second used the tyre in its original form with cuts to model the neck, tail, and wings adorned with wirework details. Precisely when the art of crafting swans from discarded car tyres came about is not yet known. Several colleagues are assisting me with research in Australian magazines of the 1940s and 1950s trying to find articles in the *Handyman* and *Homecraft* sections that might give design

illustrations and instructions on making tyre swans. Meanwhile, contemporary interest in swan making continues with websites, exhibition displays, and an annual tyre swan festival held in New South Wales (at Rylstone) featuring workshops to ensure that this is not a lost art.

### The 'breeding pair'

But my real concern is not so much with how they were made but who made them. So imagine then my excitement at spotting a pair of swans at a local house sale viewing in the Adelaide suburb of Wayville. This turned out to be a deceased estate: as the real estate agent was not in a position to allow me to acquire them, I duly contacted the solicitor with my request. My museum curator's nose twitched when we met at the site but the swans were nowhere to be seen. A neighbour was contacted and he had put them in his shed for safekeeping. I paid the solicitor fifty dollars for the swans and two other tyre ornaments that had been in use in this garden. Significantly, the neighbour was able to tell me about the maker of the swans as well as the garden's history. Here was the ultimate find: a breeding pair of swans with full genealogy and their role in their original garden home!





## Urns and planters

Snow Shilabeer, of Penong, SA, had made this pair in 1950 for his (splendidly named) sister, Avis Pirie, who lived in the same Californian style bungalow in Wayville for over fifty years. Snow had also modelled other tyre-based garden ornaments and planters for use in this suburban garden. Avis's husband worked at the Maralinga rocket testing site; being away from their home for long stretches of time he had concreted the whole backyard where Avis cultivated cymbidium orchids—the shade house still stands. After this simplification of the backyard he reduced the front garden so that it was easier for Avis to maintain, leaving just a small patch of buffalo grass that she enjoyed (since it did not require watering). The tyre swans held pots of pelargoniums, bringing floral decoration to the flat concrete areas. The swan is definitely suited to the dry-climate garden.

## Romantic ornament and modernist moment

Despite my romantic view of the tyre swan being part of the continuum for the ornamental tradition of the Western garden, there is also a modernist moment in its ethos and aesthetic. It is captured in the conversion of the divine circle of rubber, product of the machine age, into the recycled object (recalling the modernist dictum that 'form follows function'), a plant holder. It is also in the reductive design treatment of the

swan's timber-based head and beak. This all adds up to more than an ordinary moment in Australian design history. Tyre swans are a useful modernist metaphor in our throw away age—an object that has spent its first life revolving and then, when cast off, evolves into a unique avian ornament for Australian gardens.

## Epilogue

Having a quartet of swans has brought my active collecting to a close since this is the exact number for a set of swans reflecting their historic source—the motor car. Of course most vehicles have a spare tyre in the boot so maybe there is room for just one more?

The 'Rylstone Rubber Round-up' is held each October at Rylstone, NSW, a three-hour drive from Sydney to the western edge of the Blue Mountains.

Three of the tyre swans from the collection are currently on exhibition at the 'Gorgeous Gardens' exhibition at the Unley Museum, 80 Edmund Avenue, Unley, South Australia.

[www.unley.sa.gov/museum](http://www.unley.sa.gov/museum)

**Richard Heathcote** is director of Carrick Hill Historic House and Garden located at Springfield in Adelaide's foothills. His most recent book *Carrick Hill: a portrait* is published by Wakefield Press. His next major project is an Australian gardening museum.

All photographs by Mick Bradley/[mickbradley.com](http://mickbradley.com)  
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Chris Webb & Charlotte Webb

## *Claude Crowe and his collections*

Claude Crowe (1914–1999) has left a legacy through his life and work in gardens throughout the Southern Highlands and southern New South Wales as well as an extensive collection of personal and business records and a living collection in his nursery.

### **Claude Crowe and Andersons nursery**

Claude Crowe began his professional career in horticulture as a gardener at the Albury High School Hostel, NSW, where he had spent his school years. In 1938 he moved to Sydney to join Anderson & Co, Summer Hill, one of Sydney's most significant nurseries of the time. This proved to be a fortuitous move as it was at Andersons that Claude worked with his future wife Isobel Tacon as well as landscape designer Paul Sorensen. Crowe moved into the cottage on the site of the nursery and soon became manager of the Garden

Planning Department. He was involved with the development of many of Andersons major landscape projects both in Sydney and across New South Wales.

In 1943, while still working for Andersons, Crowe moved to Berrima to work in the firm's Berrima Nursery run by Paul Sorensen at The Parsonage, a property Sorensen had leased from the Church of England. The nursery specialised in cool climate plants and seed production. In conjunction with Andersons, Paul Sorensen undertook landscape design work in the area, with Crowe involved in the construction and maintenance. One such project was Greenhills at Werai, owned by Captain Patrick: this was an Andersons project, designed by Paul Sorensen and carried out by Claude Crowe (with detailed daily tasks neatly recorded in his diaries).

Of special interest in the Crowe collection is an isometric plan of Redlands, Mittagong (dated

5/2/42 and identified as an Andersons project), with the plan checked by 'PS'. Its inclusion in the Crowe collection suggests Claude Crowe was involved in the installation of the garden and the discovery of this plan should confirm any doubt about the involvement of Sorensen at Redlands.

In late 1943 Andersons advised Crowe the company would be leaving Berrima and that Sorensen would take over the stock, which would continue to be sold to Andersons in Sydney. (One question yet to be resolved is the nature of the relationship between Andersons and Sorensen: was Sorensen an employee, a contractor, or possibly some type of partner?) Rather than being passed on to Sorensen's employ, Claude Crowe resigned from Anderson & Co in September 1943 to set up his own nursery in Jellore Street, Berrima. He continued to grow seeds for the war effort and to expand his new nursery, the Berrima Bridge Nurseries, which operated from 1943 to 2003 under his guidance and that of his son Noel.

Claude Crowe at work, c.1999.

Photographer unknown.  
Caroline Simpson Library  
& Research Collection,  
Historic Houses Trust



## The Crowe Archive

In late 2003 it came to the attention of the Australian Garden History Society Southern Highlands Branch that extensive records and papers were stored in the disused nursery office at Berrima Bridge Nurseries. Discussions took place between the Branch Committee, Colleen Morris (then Chair of the AGHS National Management Committee), Megan Martin (Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales), Isobel Crowe, and her son Noel. On 27 November 2003, after all were in agreement, Megan and Colleen arrived to collect a carload of records and papers.

Once in Sydney Megan Martin commenced conservation and cataloguing of the disparate collection of docket books, ledgers, propagation lists, correspondence with customers and suppliers, daily diaries, garden plans, photographs, nursery catalogues from both international and Australian nurseries, Berrima Bridge Nurseries catalogues, plus an extensive library of gardening books. The Crowe diaries were kept from 1943 to 1945, and recommenced in 1980 until 1999, the year of Claude Crowe's death. At this point his wife Isobel took over the task of the daily entries, which she continued until the day before she died in June 2008.

Over time the collection has grown as Noel arrives intermittently at the Caroline Simpson Library with more boxes to add to the collection. As this article is being written, Megan Martin has advised additional records have arrived, this time letters between Claude and Isobel Crowe from the early 1940s, when they were working at Anderson & Co., until Claude moved to Berrima.

The Crowe records have revealed a treasure trove of detailed information of life as a nursery proprietor, landscape designer, and plant breeder from the war years to the turn of the century. Records range from the mundane daily weather recording to the extraordinary interaction with a vast number of clients across all levels of society. The records also detail the operation of the nursery and the gradual shift from a predominantly seed growing nursery to the operation of a full general nursery offering a landscape design service.

## Garden history evidence

The early Crowe diaries are full of interest, for instance, describing life working at The Parsonage with Paul Sorensen. The Parsonage was obviously a magnet to the Southern Highlands gardening fraternity of the time, including visits from Lady Gowrie, the Governor General's wife.



In September 1943 Claude writes 'Mr & Mrs Sorensen arrived last night. Lady Gowrie visited up at 3.45pm and did not alight from car.'

When Crowe left Andersons in 1943 he was followed by a number of the Andersons customers. These included Mr and Mrs Taylor from Shirley at Bombala. Claude Crowe continued to work at Shirley designing, supplying plants, and carrying out the installation of new and modified areas of the garden for many years. The Crowe collection includes correspondence from the Taylors, sketches with measurements in Claude's field books, copies of final garden plans, and dockets for plant sales. This is a typical relationship between Claude and his clients evident in the collection; a relationship that continued for many years with regular correspondence and frequent garden visits.

Claude Crowe worked on numerous gardens allied to different churches including Bishopscourt, the home of the Anglican Archbishops of Sydney. Crowe also worked with Margaret Davis, instigator of the Remembrance Driveway Scheme and inaugural President of Garden Clubs of

Australia, designing and constructing miniature gardens for The Red Cross Chelsea Flower Show in Sydney's Domain.

The Crowe diaries make mention of regular visits from Roy Rumsey of United Seed Growers to inspect the progress of seed production at Berrima Bridge Nurseries as Claude had entered into contracts to grow seed for the 'Mother Seed Program'. The aim of this program, initiated by the Commonwealth Vegetable Seed Committee, was to produce food crop seed to be stored and protected in the event of invasion during World War Two. Crowe mentions a visit to Hillview, the governor's country residence at Sutton Forest, to inspect different cultivars of tomatoes being grown. Further research may reveal the governor's gardeners were also involved in the same scheme.

### Isobel Crowe

Claude Crowe was not alone in his endeavors to establish a leading nursery and garden design business. Always by his side was his wife Isobel. She had trained as a horticulturist entering into the first horticulture course at Sydney Technical

The Crowe diaries were kept from 1943 to 1945, and recommenced again in 1980 continuing until 1999, the year of Claude Crowe's death. At this point Isobel, his wife, took over the task of the daily entries which she continued until the day before she died in June 2008.



Camellia flowers collected as part of the recording of the Berrima Bridge Nursery collections.

Photos: Chris and Charlotte Webb



College in 1938, after completing her Certificate in Typing, Certificate in Bookkeeping, Certificate in Advanced Bookkeeping, and a two-year course in Agriculture. She graduated from Sydney Technical College with the highest average mark for the three-year course and as the first female graduate.

Others in the course at Sydney Technical College include luminaries such as Ray Rowell, horticulture lecturer and author of a number of reference books including *Ornamental Flowering Trees in Australia*—Isobel and Claude are both acknowledged in this volume for their help on Cotoneaster and Malus.

Berrima Bridge Nurseries was unique in the strong relationship that developed between Claude and his customers. Although other nurseries operated in the area during this time, including Ferguson & Sons at Mittagong and Jensen's Nursery at Exeter, Berrima Bridge Nurseries was by far the most respected because of the knowledge and time Claude Crowe spent with each customer to ensure they had exactly the right plants. A key identifying feature of Crowe's garden designs is his vast array of plant species used in each garden, with his plans often resembling an arboretum. Single handedly he ensured the diversity of plants throughout numerous gardens in the Southern Highlands. In speaking with Isobel in 2005 she observed 'The Southern Highlands is our landscape'.

## Heritage at risk

The property of Berrima Bridge Nurseries has recently been listed for sale. This places the existing plant material at risk as the property has no protection from listing as an item of heritage significance either locally or on the NSW state register.

In 2011 the AGHS Southern Highlands Branch commissioned Chris and Charlotte Webb to create an inventory of the plants in the nursery garden and assess their significance. Of particular interest was the mother plant for the *Acer palmatum dissectum* 'Berrima Bridge', one of Crowe's cultivars, and the collection of *Camellia japonica* which, according to Isobel Crowe, had been propagated from stock at Camden Park by Claude.

During the inventory process weekly site visits have been undertaken throughout the camellia flowering season to identify, photograph, describe, and measure the flowers and leaves of each cultivar. Help has been sought in the identification process from the team involved in the re-establishment of camellias at Camden Park and members of the Camellia Ark Project. A number of the camellias have been identified as cultivars now lost from the Camden Park collection. Others may have been lost to cultivation altogether in Australia.

To ensure the ongoing existence of these camellias beyond the single plant on the site, the Southern Highlands Branch has organised for cuttings of the camellia collection to be taken. This coming season some cultivars will be grafted. Unresolved issues that now arise are how to manage the existing mature camellias, the future of any young plants that grow from the stock, and the funding of the management of the plants.

Chris Webb and Charlotte Webb operate a landscape design and heritage consultancy practice in Bowral, NSW. They have been involved with many of the heritage gardens in the Southern Highlands. They also knew Claude Crowe personally.

# Netscape:

Roslyn Russell & Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections*, 2nd ed., Collections Council of Australia Ltd, Adelaide, 2009 (ISBN 9780977544636: paperback edition), pdf version online at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/significance2-0/](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/significance2-0/)

We all encounter collections at some stage of our lives and frequently we are asked to comment on the collections of others. Garden historians might encounter a cupboard containing old seed packets or horticultural show certificates, a library of gardening books, or even the manuscript records of nursery or landscape architect. Towards the more edgy end of the spectrum might be a living collection of plants, be they roses in a flower garden or mature trees in an arboretum. These examples may have been sketched in the abstract, but in reality they all represent collections on which Australian Garden History Society members or branch committees have been invited to give opinions or make value judgments in the last few years.

There are no right or wrong answers, but many shades of opinion. But when the assessment involves an institution or other form of third party, or in a host of other circumstances, we might want to both quantify and qualify our assessment. Having some widely accepted practice can make this much easier and certainly less complex—as has been found with the widely accepted principles enshrined in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, for instance, in the assessment of places of cultural significance. Collections though, due to their multiplicity of individual and often disparate components, pose many challenges.

This is where this document is such a valuable tool. Published originally in 2001, this guide was a Heritage Collections Council project undertaken by the authors for the Cultural Ministers Council, an intergovernmental forum for Ministers responsible for culture and the arts in Australia and New Zealand. It takes readers through the concept of significance, how it might be assessed, how it might be succinctly stated, and finally how such an evaluation might be applied. Whilst it is mainly directed at promoting an industry-wide standard for museums, galleries, archives, and libraries, the principles it enshrines can be used for collections of all sizes and levels of significance.

Some guiding principles were adopted during the formulation of the document. Firstly, we cannot keep everything forever—a significance assessment is therefore vital to make best use

of scarce resources for collecting and conserving materials. Significance is relative and dynamic—our views depend upon perspective and can change over time. Consultation is vital to ensure a balanced view of societal memory and identity—significance decisions inevitably privilege some memories and marginalise or exclude others. And finally, it is vital to understand and document the context of collections.

The core message of this document is the need to formulate a well-researched ‘statement of significance’, an assessment that makes reference to primary and comparative criteria. Significance is defined here as ‘the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. Significance helps unlock the potential of collections, creating opportunities for communities to access and enjoy collections, and to understand the history, cultures and environments of Australia.’ Such an assessment goes beyond the normal concept of a catalogue description to explain *why* and *how* an item is important and what it means. A statement of significance will be a readable summary of the values, meaning, and importance of an item.

Four primary criteria are suggested: historical, artistic or aesthetic, scientific or research potential, and social or spiritual. Four comparative criteria are then suggested to evaluate the degree of significance: provenance, rarity or representativeness, condition or completeness, and interpretive capacity. Although not specifically formulated with living collections in mind, it is clear that these criteria might be very useful in dealing with the dynamic, organic components that make up such a key part of our national collection of significant gardens and designed landscapes. This is, perhaps, an issue to which we should return in a future journal. In the meantime, consult this document and gain from the collective wisdom of its authors and sponsoring institutions.

**Richard Aitken**





# Remembering Helen Proudfoot

Penelope Pike

While Helen Proudfoot will be remembered primarily as an erudite historian of architecture and town planning in Australia, and especially for her pioneering work in the latter field, she will also be remembered for her many significant contributions to Australian garden history.

Helen Colleen Baker was born in Gunnedah in May 1930 and educated in Armidale at the New England Girls School and at Sydney University, where she graduated in Arts with first class honours in history and English literature and took a postgraduate Masters in Town Planning.

Helen was appointed by Rod Fraser as the historian to the Cumberland County Council (the post-war planning body for metropolitan Sydney) in 1960 to prepare the first informed list of 'places of scientific and historic interest' in the County. The Council published four of her volumes, on Parramatta, the central area of Sydney, Liverpool and Campbelltown, and Windsor and Richmond. In 1963 I joined as her assistant, researching material for her fifth book (*Elizabeth Bay House*) in this series.

The hallmarks of her work were meticulous research based on primary sources, field examination to verify those sources, and a pioneering approach in bringing together all elements of the cultural landscape to the understanding of individual buildings. She kept a card index cross-referencing places, people, writers, artists, and articles. She wrote beautifully, unraveling the 'genius loci' of a place.

Chris Levins, Director of the Parramatta Park Trust, relates that her sixth volume for the Council (by then the State Planning Authority), *Old Government House: the building and its landscape* (1971), remains a basic reference document in the management of the Park.

Working for Helen involved hours in Mitchell Library searching papers, letters, and paintings; scrambles through morning glory in search of Macleay's grotto and terrace walls at Elizabeth Bay House; tea with Mrs Terry in the drawing room at Rouse Hill House; and poetry readings of W.C. Wentworth in the graveyard at Castlereagh.

In 1968 Helen married Peter Proudfoot, then a lecturer in architecture at the University of NSW, and they had two daughters and later four grandchildren.



In the late 1970s Helen suffered the first of a series of heart attacks and strokes that were to interrupt her work for the rest of her life. Undeterred she continued to research and write, her published works covering the years from 1961–2007. Amongst this output, she wrote on the Picturesque (for the Royal Australian Historical Society), on Hyde Park and on Roman Gardens (for *Australian Garden History*), and was a generous contributor to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens*.

Professor Richard Clough recounts how Helen asked him what she should do with the papers about Jocelyn Brown prepared by Brown's husband Alfred, and given by him to architect and town planner Denis Winston who in turn had passed them on to her. After several unsuccessful attempts to prepare them for publication, they remained in Helen's possession. Richard advised her to write a monograph on Jocelyn Brown using them as a starting point. This she did, and the result—the definitive work on this great garden designer—was published in 1989.

Helen was awarded the prestigious Sidney Luker Memorial Medal by the Australian Planning



Institute in 1990 for her contribution to urban planning. Through her articles in numerous professional journals, books, and heritage studies she had brought new insight to our understanding of the evolving built form of our cities and towns.

After a debilitating stroke in 1991 she learnt to write with her left hand and with her characteristic courage continued to attend talks and events, and to work on her PhD thesis (Macquarie University, 1996) on the early planning of New South Wales and its impact on settlement, because she found that so few of her colleagues understood the foundations of their profession. Hopefully this ground-breaking thesis will yet be published.

Helen Proudfoot brought to the study of garden history the same disciplined approach to research and the passion for accuracy that characterised everything she wrote. Her imaginative approach to the examination of our history and her attractive, easy style of writing established a standard for those working in what was then a relatively new discipline.

**Penelope Pike** is a retired Sydney-based planner who has worked for the conservation of historic places such as Leichhardt, Hunters Hill, Ashfield, Parramatta, and for Eryldene historic house and garden in Gordon.

## Select list of published writings

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- Historic Buildings, Vol. II: Central area of Sydney*, Cumberland County Council, [Sydney], 1962.
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- Hyde Park Barracks*, Angus and Robertson in association with the State Planning Authority of New South Wales, Sydney, 1965.
- Historic Buildings [Vol. IV]: Windsor and Richmond*, The State Planning Authority of New South Wales, [Sydney], 1967; rev. ed., Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, NSW, 1987.
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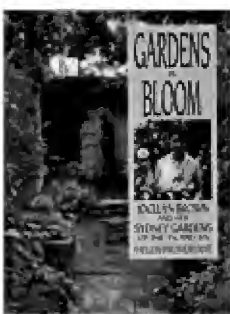
### 1970s

- [*Historic Buildings, Vol. VI: Old Government House, the building and its landscape*, The State Planning Authority of New South Wales in association with Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971.
- 'Captain Piper and Henrietta Villa', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59 (3), 1973, pp. 162–81.
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- 'Attitudes and evidence: the view from Government House verandah', in *Australian Studies in Architectural History*, SAHANZ, Sydney, 13–16 May 1988, pp.1–9; also published in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 75 (2), October 1989, pp.110–21.
- Cadman's Cottage: Sydney Cove's oldest building*, Proudfoot Press, Sydney, 1988.



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*Sydney Harbour: paradise of waters*, Proudfoot Press, Sydney, 1988.

'Jocelyn Brown and her Sydney gardens of the '30s and '40s', *Australian Garden History*, 1 (3), Oct/Nov 1989, pp.1–2.

*Gardens in Bloom: Jocelyn Brown and her Sydney gardens of the '30s and '40s*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, NSW, 1989.

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'Foreword' to *Interwar Gardens: a guide to the history, conservation and management of gardens of 1915–40*, Parks and Gardens Conservation Committee, National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), Sydney, 2003.

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# For the bookshelf

Craig R. Joel, *A Tale of Ambition and Unrealised Hope: John Montagu and Sir John Franklin*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2011 (ISBN 9781921509827): 476pp, paperback, RRP \$44

Sir John Franklin had the misfortune to be appointed to the post of Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemens Land immediately after George Arthur. He inherited much of Arthur's administration including Arthur's nephews John Montagu, the future Colonial Secretary, and the Chief Police Magistrate Matthew Forster. Franklin, a former naval officer, was used to having his orders carried out without question. He lacked the experience of a penal colony governor and the 'Arthur faction' did not make life easy for him. Montagu was finally suspended from office, returned to England and took his revenge by encouraging the Colonial Office to recall Franklin.

This is a complex tale of political manoeuvring that Craig Joel tells very clearly, exposing the hubris of many of those involved on either side of the world where communication could take months. The period covered was one of intense change in Tasmania when the probation system replaced the assignment system with all the associated administrative and financial problems. The author leads the reader through these conflicts to expose the underbelly of colonial politics using many extracts from original documents, all carefully end-noted for subsequent researchers.

Although not the main focus of the book I would have liked to learn more of the characters of the Franklins. For those with a more scientific interest Joel barely mentions the Franklins' support and encouragement of the Horticultural Society, the Royal Society of Tasmania, the Domain Botanical Gardens and Observatory or the Mechanics Institute of Hobart. These and the establishment of Ancanthe, the institute for learning in Hobart, and the Franklins' arduous overland journey from Hobart to Port Davey, an incredible test of physical endurance, could be the basis of another volume.

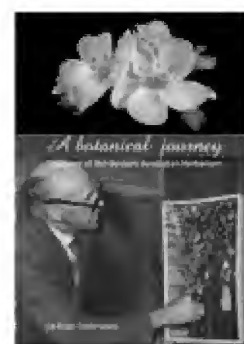
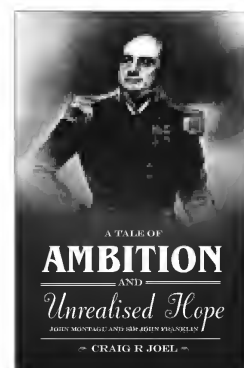
This is a very readable book, well researched and written and one that is of great value to those interested in Tasmanian political history and in the colourful characters who shaped it.

**Mike Evans & Dorothy Evans**  
Tasmanian Branch

Roger Underwood, *A Botanical Journey: the story of the Perth Herbarium*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Perth, 2011 (ISBN 9781921703126): 282pp, paperback, RRP \$49.95, available online at DEC website <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au>

A dense volume, beautifully illustrated, this account of the botanical exploration of Western Australia and the formation and evolution of the Western Australian Herbarium begins with the role of herbaria since ancient times, and the botanical revolution which coincided with the European settlement of Australia. More than 20,000 species of plants occur naturally in Australia, 80 per cent of which occur nowhere else. Western Australia contains roughly half of Australia's plant species. Its flora is astonishingly diverse by international standards. Subsequent chapters deal with the challenges of collecting plants over such a vast area, the pioneers, and their remarkable skills. Matthew Flinders' botanist Robert Brown recognised distinct species which research has only recently confirmed. Ferdinand von Mueller was enthralled by the Western Australian flora and encouraged its conservation. A herbarium was called for, its formation prompted by the effects of poison plants on agriculture: hence the Bureau of Agriculture appointed the state's first botanist after its formation in 1894, although specimens had been collected before then. The herbarium expanded and the book portrays many of the personalities involved in its development, including some of the wonderful botanical artists which Western Australia has been privileged to have. My only criticism of this book is that the case for more research and writing about the state's wonderfully diverse flora is not more stridently made.

**Caroline Grant**  
West Australian Branch



# Recent releases

James Beattie, *Empire and Environmental Anxiety: health, science, art and conservation in South Asia and Australasia, 1800–1920*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2011 (ISBN 9780230553200): hardback, 336pp, RRP £55

This is a rich and complex book, hardly the stuff of the bedside table, yet amply repaying a close reading. Through the four stated themes of his subtitle and the environments that generate his ‘anxieties’, New Zealand author James Beattie devotes seven loosely chronological chapters to his case. The environmental anxiety of his title refers to ‘concerns generated when environments did not conform to European preconceptions about their natural productivity or when colonisation set in motion a series of unintended environmental consequences’. Perhaps of most interest to garden historians will be Beattie’s chapter on aesthetics, where the career of artist Alfred Sharpe (1836–1908)—whose work embraced trans-Tasman gardens and landscapes—forms the vehicle for a wide-ranging discussion of romanticism and the environment.

Margaret Brookes & Richard Barley, *Plants Listed in Nursery Catalogues in Victoria, 1855 to 1889*, 2nd ed., Garden Plant Conservation Association of Australia Inc., South Yarra, Vic., 2009 (ISBN 9780646505510): 198pp, paperback, RRP \$30 (available from GPCAA, <http://gpcaa.typepad.com/settings/books/> to download order form)

Not necessarily recent but enduring is this invaluable guide to nineteenth-century garden plants. Compiled from 23 nursery catalogues,

the listing is alphabetical by genus (also usefully listing superseded nomenclature) with an indication of form, habit, type, and years of listing. Could be used—with caution—for plant collections in similar climatic zones.

Joan Webb, *A Birdstuffer’s Library: a 19th century naturalist’s library*, The Author, North Ryde, NSW, 2009 (ISBN 9780958027731): paperback, 106pp, RRP \$36 (available from the author, 02 9878 1289, price includes postage)

Our bibliographic birdstuffer is George Caley (1770–1829), who collected in New South Wales for Banks from 1800–10, and whose substantial library Christie’s auctioned on his death. From the resulting catalogue and her extensive research on Caley, Joan Webb paints a fascinating picture of colonial botany, the book trade, and her hunt for provenanced volumes from Caley’s library.

Sarah Whittingham, *Fern Fever: the story of pteridomania*, Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2012 (ISBN 9780711230705): hardback, 256pp, RRP £35

The story of fern collecting has been told several times, but this handsomely illustrated volume combined with the author’s eye for detail creates a worthy new contribution. Australia is part of the global action by virtue of its iconic tree ferns, and tangentially through the writings of George Francis, an early British populariser of ferns before his departure for South Australia in the 1840s.

In *Stanley Spencer and the English Garden* (Compton Verney, 2011), editor Steven Parissen curates an emerging modernism of the 1930s and 1940s seen through Spencer’s characteristic oils, at once local and domestic yet deeply symbolic.

Available from Carrick Hill, \$38.95 plus postage, 08 8433 1700

Stanley Spencer, *Cottages at Burghclere*, 1930. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



# Dialogue

## Garden Plant Conservation Association of Australia

Starting a plant collection? Recent browsing by AGH on the website of the Garden Plant Conservation Association of Australia Inc. was rewarded with the discovery of the GPCAA's 'Ideas for a Plant Collection' (2011), which is aimed at harnessing the collective efforts of gardening enthusiasts in contributing to plant conservation. Designed to whet the appetite of the prospective or inveterate plant collector, this web page provides a whole range of suggestions for structuring your prospective plant collection—be it for plants deserving of conservation status, or based on particular climate zones, architectural periods, or fashionable genera with many cultivars, the list goes on. The GPCAA's publication *Plants Listed in Nursery Catalogues in Victoria 1855–1889* is recommended as an aid to planning.

<http://gpcaa.typepad.com/settings/starting-a-plant-collection.html>

## Gremlins in the typetray

As author of the report on The Botany Behind Gardens Forum in our last issue, Stuart Read's name inadvertently slipped off the edge of our last issue—our apologies for causing such a generous contributor to slide into undeserved anonymity. And whilst we have our tail between our legs, please note the correct e-mail contact for Gillian Lilleyman—whose splendid book *A Garden on the Margaret* we reviewed in the same issue—should have read [wlilleym@bigpond.net.au](mailto:wlilleym@bigpond.net.au)

## Gumnuts of appreciation

Following our last issue, Jane Brummitt writes: 'I was delighted to see *More Than a Fairy Tale* included in your reviews of recent releases. Thank you for your enthusiasm. However, though passionate about my subject and connected to May Gibbs by marriage I am not a descendant. Her brother Ivan married my aunt Josephine Porter. May married in her forties but did not have children—apart from her gumnut babies. With gumnuts full of appreciation for your excellent publication, which I always enjoy reading.'

## Garden Discoveries ...

Whether you are an avid horticulturist or simply love 'smelling the roses'.

## South Australia: Wildflowers, Wines and Wildlife

ADELAIDE • CLARE VALLEY • FLINDERS RANGES • ADELAIDE HILLS

9–18 September 2012

Join 'gourmet gardener'

Julie Kinney on a glorious springtime meander through a kaleidoscope of hills, gardens and valleys of South Australia. Visit a number of private gardens, homesteads, wineries, artists' studios and sheep stations. Optional extension to Kangaroo Island.



## Griffith Festival of Gardens

A LONG WEEKEND IN GRIFFITH

11–15 October 2012



Join Fiona Ogilvie for a long weekend in Griffith, country New South Wales' best kept secret, for the annual Griffith Festival of Gardens offering a fantastic variety of private gardens, open only during the Garden Festival. Enjoy visits to wineries along with fine wine and good food.

**R**  
**Renaissance**  
Tours

For detailed information call 1300 727 095 or visit [www.renaissancetours.com.au](http://www.renaissancetours.com.au)

# Profile: Tony Whitehill

During 2011 the Australian Garden History Society National Management Committee resolved to approve the new category of 'honorary life membership', to acknowledge outstanding service to the Society. James Anthony (Tony) Whitehill is the first member to have been thus honoured.

Tony began his career as an apprentice gardener with the Adelaide Botanic Gardens in 1956 and retired in 1998 as Tree Advisory Officer. His career with the Gardens spanned forty years including brief positions as Gardener (1963) and Technical Assistant (1965) before being appointed as Tree Advisory Officer in 1966. His time with the Gardens was interrupted in 1960 when he worked at Jackman's Nursery in Woking, Surrey, U.K., for six months and then for a further two years to obtain a Kew Diploma at the Royal Botanic Gardens, U.K. In 1973 he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship 'To study the treatment of sites and landscape developments in restoration of areas used for extractive industries and public buildings: N.Z., U.K., Canada, and U.S.A.'.

Tony was on the original AGHS Committee (1980), inaugural State Chairman in South Australia, and an Elected Representative on National Management Committee (1981–90). As well as building up an active Branch of over 60 members, Tony was instrumental for and actively involved in the organisation of the first three Garden History conferences in Adelaide, and oversaw many Branch projects such as the restoration of both the Belair Maze and Bishops Court Garden in North Adelaide. Also during this time he co-authored *Some Significant Gardens in South Australia* published 1981 with Rodney Beames and rewrote the publication in 1998 to include Carrick Hill and the Edna Walling garden at Medindie. The publication included criteria for listing significant gardens, the first use of these criteria in Australia.

Tony was also instrumental in designing the Significant Tree Register for the National Trust in South Australia and this was used as a model for all subsequent tree registers throughout the country. He is still actively involved in assessing trees and adding them to the Register.

When the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide was contracted by the City of Unley in 1992 to undertake the first comprehensive metropolitan council Street Tree and Significant Tree Register, Tony designed the 18-month project and



oversaw its management to completion and report publication. Since then many metropolitan councils have followed suit.

In 1992 Tony was awarded the Public Service Medal for outstanding service to the Community and Sector for his role as Tree Advisory Officer at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens and in 'establishing tree and shrub plots in low rainfall areas of South Australia to test their hardiness'. The criteria for this Medal include: service excellence to the public for external or internal clients; innovation in programme, project, or policy development; leadership including as a member of a team; or the advancement of more efficient processes, improved productivity, or better service delivery. Tony met all these criteria not only as a government employee but as a private citizen who volunteered many hours of his own time, giving advice freely to the National Trust, local boroughs, and community organisations.

Tony is a popular guest speaker on local and international garden history and in particular on his visits to gardens in the U.K., France, Spain, and Italy.

**Margaret Sando & Richard Nolan**  
South Australian Branch



# Diary dates

## APRIL 2012

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<b>Saturday 14</b>	<b>Mornington Peninsula day tour</b>	<b>VICTORIA</b>
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Join us on a fascinating tour of three historic Peninsular properties—The Briars, Beleura, and McCrae Homestead. Enquires to Warwick Forge, (03) 9819 1335 or 0438 182 801 (after hours)

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<b>Sunday 15</b>	<b>Ascot garden visits</b>	<b>QUEENSLAND</b>
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Visit to Beaufort Hill and another garden in Ascot. More details will be available closer to the event.

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<b>Friday 20</b>	<b>Tour of Government House gardens</b>	<b>TASMANIA</b>
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Guided tour of the Government House gardens with the Head Gardener. 2:30pm. Additional details will be provided on the Tasmanian Branch of AGHS webpage closer to the event.

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<b>Saturday 21</b>	<b>Mooleric working bee</b>	<b>VICTORIA</b>
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A working bee for AGHS members and friends at Mooleric, Birregurra. Please bring secateurs and other appropriate tools suitable for a large country garden. Contact Fran Faul for details on (03) 9853 1369 or [malfaul@alphalink.com.au](mailto:malfaul@alphalink.com.au)

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<b>Sunday 22</b>	<b>Historic Burradoo walk</b>	<b>SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS</b>
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An AGHS function in conjunction with National Trust Heritage Week, walking around historic gardens and sites of Burradoo. The walk will finish at Patchway, Ranelagh Road, with afternoon tea. 2pm, start at Oxley College, Railway Parade, Burradoo. Cost: \$25. Booking is essential. Enquiries to Lyn Esdaile, Secretary on (02) 4887 7122 or [garlynar@bigpond.com](mailto:garlynar@bigpond.com)

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<b>Monday 23–Friday 27</b>	<b>Monaro &amp; mountains, Autumn tour</b>	<b>NATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>
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Over five days, the tour will explore historic properties, buildings, and private gardens of the region and provide insight into historic and creative works these places and landscapes have inspired. The tour will be led by Trisha Burkitt, writer-photographer and long-time resident of the Monaro district.

## MAY 2012

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<b>Saturday 5</b>	<b>Working bee at Summerhome</b>	<b>TASMANIA</b>
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There will be a working bee in this significant historic garden followed by a barbecue lunch provided by the Committee. Enquiries to Wendy Ebsworth at [wendyebsworth@yahoo.com.au](mailto:wendyebsworth@yahoo.com.au)

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<b>Saturday 5</b>	<b>William Guilfoyle centenary seminar</b>	<b>VICTORIA</b>
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A seminar to celebrate the legacy of William Guilfoyle (1840–1912), Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne 1873–1909. Mueller Hall, The Herbarium, RBG Melbourne. See Flyer and Branch webpage for full details. Enquiries to (03) 9836 1881 or [pdjellie@hotmail.com](mailto:pdjellie@hotmail.com)

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<b>Sunday 13</b>	<b>Goulburn self-drive tour and picnic</b>	<b>SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS</b>
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Visit the original historic Chisholm Estate Merrilla at Parkesbourne, 15 minutes south of Goulburn, enjoy morning tea provided by the AGHS, and then a BYO picnic lunch in the Edna Walling style garden. After lunch return to Goulburn to visit the small town garden of Millewa. Cost: \$20. Enquiries to Lynette Esdaile on (02) 4887 7122 or [garlynar@bigpond.com](mailto:garlynar@bigpond.com)

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<b>Wednesday 16</b>	<b>Edna Walling and Jocelyn Brown</b>	<b>SYDNEY &amp; NORTHERN NSW</b>
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Dr Bronwyn Hanna and Stuart Read will speak on Edna Walling and Jocelyn Brown, two women designers and their work in NSW, from the 1930s to 1950s. 6pm for 7–8.30pm, Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill. Cost: \$20 members, \$30 guests, includes light refreshments. Bookings essential. Bookings & enquiries to Jeanne Villani (02) 9997 5995 or [Jeanne@Villani.com](mailto:Jeanne@Villani.com)

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<b>Saturday 19</b>	<b>Glenara working bee</b>	<b>VICTORIA</b>
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A working bee for AGHS members and friends at Glenara, Bulla. Please bring secateurs and other appropriate tools suitable for a large country garden. Contact Fran Faul for details on [malfaul@alphalink.com.au](mailto:malfaul@alphalink.com.au) or (03) 9853 1369

## Saturday 19–Sunday 20 Toowoomba gardens

QUEENSLAND

We will visit a number of gardens in and around Toowoomba, including gardens visited on the 2011 pre-Maryborough conference tour. More details will be available closer to the event.

## Thursday 24 Horticulture and Australian War Graves

ACT/RIVERINA/MONARO

Keith Thorogood, Manager of the South Australian Office of Australian War Graves will speak on aspects of horticulture in some of the seventy five Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemeteries located in Australia and Papua and New Guinea. His lecture is titled 'Honouring Our War Dead: Horticulture and the Office of Australian War Graves'. This is a joint event with The Friends of the National Library of Australia. 6pm, National Library of Australia. Booking details to be provided in the next Branch newsletter.

## JUNE 2012

### Sunday 12 Heritage trees in the landscape

VICTORIA

The first of our winter lecture series with speaker Dr Greg Moore. 6pm, Mueller Hall, The Herbarium, RBG Melbourne. See Branch webpage for full details closer to the date.

### Sunday 17 Creating garden history with trees

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

Our Winter Seminar features speakers Justice Michael Pembroke, author of *Trees of History and Romance*, and Jocelyn Plovits, ACT arboretum. East Bowral Community Centre. For enquiries contact Lynette Esdaile on (02) 4887 7122 or [garlynar@bigpond.com](mailto:garlynar@bigpond.com)

### Saturday 23 Pyrmont: Picnics, quarries, towers, and pocket parks

SYDNEY

Guided walk with Stuart Read around Pyrmont peninsula, once a gaggle of industry and quarries, now apartments, renewal, delightful pocket and harbour-side parks with great views and stories to tell. Cost: \$20 members, \$30 guests, includes light refreshments. Bookings essential. Bookings and enquiries to Jeanne Villani (02) 9997 5995 or [Jeanne@Villani.com](mailto:Jeanne@Villani.com)

## NOVEMBER 2012

### Friday 9–Sunday 11 AGHS Annual National Conference, Ballarat, Victoria

The Australian Garden History Society's 33rd Annual National Conference will be held in Ballarat in late Spring, 9–11 November 2011. (The conference flyer is included in this issue of AGH.)



## Executive Officer

The Australian Garden History Society is seeking a suitable person to fill the role of Executive Officer (4 days per week/28 hours). The Executive Officer will be responsible to the National Management Committee for the efficient administration of the Society. The AGHS office is located in Melbourne.

The ideal applicant should have

- Good organisational skills and the ability to meet deadlines
- An ability to plan and deliver small projects
- Demonstrated experience in small office management
- An ability to work with minimal supervision
- Good communication skills
- An ability to support a committee of management and act as secretary
- An ability to engage with members in a friendly and helpful manner
- Experience in managing staff and volunteer workers
- Proficient computer skills in Microsoft Office applications

- A knowledge of Australian garden history would be an advantage
- Proficiency in Microsoft Access, PowerPoint, and internet applications would be seen as an advantage.

Some interstate travel to attend meetings and the annual conference is expected.

This is a part-time position with a salary package in the vicinity of \$49,000 (includes annual leave and sick leave).

A position description can be obtained from the Executive Officer, Jackie Courmadias on 03 9650 5043, email: [info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au). Further information about the role can be discussed with Jackie Courmadias or with the Chairman Dr John Dwyer c/- AGHS office.

Applications should be addressed to the Chairman and sent, with Curriculum Vitae, by email to [info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au) or posted to the AGHS Office, Gate Lodge, 100 Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne by 27 April 2012.

# Myall Park Botanic Garden, Glenmorgan, Queensland

Nita C. Lester

## The place

Located on the western Darling Downs, Myall Park Botanic Garden is an all-Australian native plant garden of 132ha. The garden displays *ex situ* and *in situ* collections of specimens from arid, semi-arid, and dry tropical sites—many not known to be cultivated elsewhere—and contains many species which are rare or threatened in their natural habitat.

Listed on the Register of the National Estate, Myall Park Botanic Garden demonstrates a high level of technical achievement through the work of David Gordon in procuring, growing, and propagating Australian plants. The garden is highly valued for its aesthetic qualities, specifically the richness of colour, diversity of form, birdsong, and fragrance. Myall Park also has social value for the local community, and has become a local focal point through considerable community involvement in the Garden's upkeep. It has educational importance to the community and students and potential research value to botanists and other scientists.

## David Gordon, collector

The work of David Gordon as collector, grower, and propagator of Australian native flora and his instrumental role in establishing the Myall Park Botanic Garden is well recognised, and its significance acknowledged in the Garden's listing on the Register of the National Estate. Before 1992, ownership of this Garden belonged to Mr and Mrs David Gordon. The first plantings had begun in the 1940s and included mainly woody species from the Proteaceae, Mimosaceae, and Myrtaceae families. During the 1950s, propagation material was collected from across Australia by seed collectors including Alf Gray—who was employed by Gordon for three years—and Len Miller. Much of the material was stored, propagated, and planted at Myall Park Botanic Garden and an extensive herbarium evolved alongside the beginnings of a unique seed bank collection. The planted collection grew over the years to cover 90ha, with an extensive road network and irrigation system within the cultivated areas.

## Managing the collection

Less well-recognised is that for the past two decades the Myall Park Botanic Garden has been owned and managed by a group of honorary directors who have

led the conservation, maintenance, and development of the place. The non-profit company, Myall Park Botanic Garden Ltd (formed in 1992), is responsible for running the complex business which includes the collections—living, seed, botanical library and herbarium—retail shop, on-site accommodation, and research and educational programmes. As a not-for-profit organisation, the Myall Park Botanic Garden relies upon donations, retail sales, Friends memberships, and admission to fund the majority of annual running costs. The regional council, Western Downs Regional Council, also generously supports the Garden through an annual donation of \$10,000 and provision of an employee on site three days a week to assist with promotion, tourist support, and marketing.

In the 1970s, the plant collection became so large that all funds from sheep grazing—also run by Mr Gordon—were poured into its management. By the 1980s, continued management of the garden was becoming too much for Mr Gordon, and numerous species were becoming naturalised and spreading throughout the site. Numerous species of hakea and grevillea became pests dominating most of the planted collection. Many other specimens were lost. In 1988, a local Friends group was invited to form a committee



Directors of the Myall Park Botanic Garden Ltd (clockwise from top left): Trevor Bacon, Peter Reilly, Gill Kidd, Lynette Reilly, Dr Nita C. Lester (Chairman), Joan Wilkinson, Megan McNicholl, Betty Salter (Secretary/Treasurer)

Photo: Chris Guihot



*Hakea recurva* regrowth in part of the restoration area at Myall Park Botanic Garden.

Photo: Chris Guihot

to assist with the saving of the estate. At this time it was recognised that extensive clearing and replanting was needed throughout most of the 90ha of cultivated area, and the irrigation system needed replacing. The committee grew in strength and formed the non-profit company in 1992. Division by division, the cultivated areas were cleared, redesigned, and replanted.

132ha is a massive area for a volunteer group to develop but over the years numerous individuals and organisations have come to our aid. One such organisation is the AGHS. I have been honoured to spend a couple of days annually in the company of Stuart Read at the annual International Dendrology Conferences. Stuart quickly recognised the importance not only of this Garden but of the contribution given by its honorary directors. Stuart introduced me to the President of the Queensland Branch of the AGHS, John Taylor. John encouraged me to apply to the Queensland Branch for a grant. There is a division within the garden completely overgrown by three hakea species. By clearing and developing a design which will include numerous dryland hakea, banksia, grevillea, dryandras, and isopogon, the directors will be able to restore the formerly rich diversity of this part of the original collection and showcase the valuable contributions these species bring to all Australian landscapes.

The division under restoration is located along a main visitor thoroughfare, and its conservation will extend to walking paths and interpretative signage. The Australian Garden History Society's part in funding this project will ensure valuable additions to our collection which will become a significant asset to our Garden. An invitation is extended to all AGHS members, to honour us with your visit in the near future so you can celebrate the success of your contribution to this significant property.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks are offered to the Australian Garden History Society, especially to Stuart Read, as the honorary directors work tirelessly to further the understanding of the importance of Australian species in all landscapes. Your support gladdens our hearts in the knowledge that our work is valued.

#### PROPOSED OFFICIAL OPENING

The project will be completed by Spring 2013 and officially opened during the Spring Open Day, 2013. Details of this exciting future event will be located on our website or by telephoning (07) 4665 6705 or emailing [myallparkbotanic@bigpond.com](mailto:myallparkbotanic@bigpond.com)



### Mission Statement

The Australian Garden History Society is the leader in concern for and conservation of significant cultural landscapes and historic gardens through committed, relevant and sustainable action.